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THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

REV. MR. TOWLE'S MEETING-HOUSE,
LONDON WALL,

JUNE 9th, 1784:

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE
PROTESTANT DISSENTING CHARITY SCHOOL
IN
LITTLE BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE, LONDON.

BY

ROBERT WINTER.

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TO
THE MANAGERS
OF THE
PROTESTANT DISSENTING CHARITY SCHOOL
IN
LITTLE BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE,
LONDON,
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
PREACHED AND PUBLISHED
AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS, WITH THE GREATEST RESPECT,
INSCRIBED
BY
THEIR MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,
THE AUTHOR.



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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

WASHINGTON

DEUTERONOMY vi. 7.

AND THOU SHALT TEACH THEM
DILIGENTLY UNTO THY CHILD-
REN ———.

IN no sentiment, perhaps, are the civilized nations of the world so much united, as in the propriety of instructing children in the principles of religion. Scarcely shall we find the name and the form of religion, where we hear not of those whose office it is to initiate the young and the ignorant into those doctrines and practices which are accounted sacred. On this ground, it may, perhaps, appear a superfluous undertaking, to attempt to vindicate the custom. But, when we consider the great importance of attending to this duty, and, when we reflect on the dreadful consequences which have frequently resulted from the neglect of

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it,

it, we cannot but apprehend, that, to recommend the religious education of children, by a few plain popular arguments, may, through the blessing of God, be productive of consequences highly beneficial. This is the object we have in view in the present discourse; an object which, we flatter ourselves, will appear not wholly unsuitable to the occasion of our assembling at this time.

To solicit your bounty for the promotion of a design calculated to advance not only the civil but the religious welfare of the young, is the pleasing and generous task which devolves on him who has now the honour to address you. To affect the passions without informing the judgment, is an end unworthy the ambition of the christian teacher. But, through the medium of solid conviction, to touch the heart and to influence the conduct, is a design so great, so noble, so important, that to be engaged in its promotion, is one of the highest honours humanity can possess. With this great design, your preacher has entered this place, and he cannot forbear

bear indulging the thought ; that, the plain dictates of simple truth, under the superior influence of heaven, will accomplish his highest wishes.

The text presents us with the noblest recommendation of religious education which can possibly be suggested to human creatures. It places before us " Moses," the servant of the Almighty, enforcing on the tribes of " Israel," the peculiar favourites of heaven, that obedience to the commands of their divine Sovereign, without which they would lose all title to that interest in his friendship of which they boasted.

With all the authority which became the messenger of the Great God, he addressed that people, in this most striking and engaging language ; language, which, surely, could not be heard, without exciting the highest veneration and the noblest pleasure.

" Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one
 " Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy
 " God, with all thine heart, and with all
 " thy soul, and with all thy might. And
 " these words which I command thee this

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" day

“ day shall be in thine heart. And thou
 “ shalt teach them diligently unto thy chil-
 “ dren, and shalt talk of them, when thou
 “ fittest in thine house, and when thou
 “ walkest by the way, and when thou liest
 “ down, and when thou risest up. And
 “ thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine
 “ hand, and they shall be as frontlets be-
 “ tween thine eyes. And thou shalt write
 “ them upon the posts of thy house, and on
 “ thy gates (a).”

A deep, constant, abiding, universal, at-
 tention to the dictates of religion, was then
 enforced on the Israelites, by an authority
 which it would have argued the blackest im-
 piety and the most aggravated ingratitude to
 have resisted. And, surely, to us who are
 favoured with the superior light of the gos-
 pel-revelation, and who, by means of that
 revelation, are possessed of motives and argu-
 ments, for attention to the dictates of reli-
 gion, which the ancient Jews very imperfect-
 ly beheld, the address is peculiarly applica-

(a) Ver. 4—9.

ble

ble—"Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children."

Permit me, then, to solicit your serious and candid attention to a few plain remarks, tending to point out the importance and the advantages of instructing the young in the principles of true religion. Let it, however, be observed, and, we wish you to feel the influence of this observation, through the whole of the discourse, that, we mean not to recommend religious education, to the exclusion of instruction in other branches of useful knowledge; for the same arguments which support the one, will likewise support the rest. But, other branches of knowledge, not being so important in themselves, nor so universally interesting, as the truths and duties of religion, it is apprehended, that, our end will be sufficiently attained, if we can evince the propriety of religious education. And it is the highest ambition of your preacher to be considered, as the humble instrument of reminding you of the force and importance of those truths, which,

doubtless, you know and feel already. We observe, then,

I. Young minds are peculiarly susceptible of instruction.

The influence of prejudice over the sentiments and conduct of men is very great. Long contracted habits, though at first they may have arisen from very small and inconsiderable causes, are not easily eradicated. And seldom is it found, that, men are willing to give up what they have long esteemed true, important, and agreeable. But, from prejudices of this nature, the young are happily freed. They know not the force of preconceived opinions, and, therefore, they are more capable of receiving information and conviction, than those who are farther advanced in years and in acquaintance with the world.

It is, likewise, to be observed, that, the minds of children, though they must be confessed to be weak and unable to admit the evidence of many truths which may be

proposed to them, are yet gradually increasing in strength. It may, therefore, very reasonably be hoped, that, instruction introduced in the early period of life, when reason begins to dawn, and, continued, as the powers of the mind expand, may be of very signal advantage, and, by proper and constant application, be the means of counteracting in some degree those bad principles which are so prevalent in the world, and which are conveyed through so many secret avenues to the heart of man.

It may be, farther, remarked, that, instructions communicated to the minds of children usually make stronger impressions on their tempers, and possess greater and more abiding influence over their conduct, than those which are conveyed in later life. On these accounts, the mind of a child has frequently been compared to a young plant or tree, which is at first capable of being bent into any form, but which, as it grows up, is immoveably fixed in the situation in which it was originally placed. It, certainly, therefore, becomes those, whose

province is the instruction of the young, to instil into them such principles as are of standing importance, and to use all their influence, to preserve them from the direction of those prejudiced views, which so powerfully present themselves to every human mind.

Let it not be thought, by what has been said, that, there is the least design of intimating, that, the minds of children are not inclined to vice. Human apostacy must be apparent to every diligent and impartial observer, even, in the first buddings of infant-reason. And experience unites with scripture, in confirming the fact, that every human mind, even, that of an infant, is strongly prepossessed in favour of evil. But, it is certain, that, what we may term, the natural prejudices of the heart, are greatly increased and confirmed by custom and habit. And, therefore, the sooner the task, of eradicating these prejudices, and introducing views and dispositions directly contrary, is attempted, the greater probability
is

is there of success. But, on this idea it is needless farther to enlarge.

II. If the minds of children are peculiarly susceptible of the influence of instruction, in general, it certainly follows, from the very nature of religion, that its instructions are most properly conveyed in the early period of life.

Under the general term, religion, we include, what may be known of God from the works of nature and providence, but, especially, from the word of divine truth, with the influence which this knowledge has on the temper and behaviour. If, then, it be of importance, that, the young possess an acquaintance with the leading truths and duties of religion (an idea to which we mean presently to attend) that certainly is the most proper time of life, for instilling them into their minds, which is most suitable to instruction in general. It must, indeed, be confessed absolutely impossible for religious instruction to overcome the depraved views
and

and tempers of the mind. That is a work which none but a divine power is able to effect. But, it pleases God, in the operations both of his providence and grace, to use probable means for accomplishing his designs. And it is certainly our duty to continue in a diligent attention to these means, looking to him alone for a blessing.

Now, what, permit me to ask you, what, has a more direct tendency to make children really religious, that is, to lead them to such an acquaintance with the truths and duties of religion, as shall engage their hearts and influence their behaviour, than religious instruction? "A child left to himself^(a)" is, surely, in the common course of things, very 'unlikely to become acquainted with the nature, and impressed with the importance, of true piety. So perverse are the prejudices and passions of the heart, even of a child, and so great the influence which the world maintains over it, that, it is scarcely to be expected, that, without religious instruction, he should

(a) Prov. xxix. 15.

possess those views of religion which we wish him to possess. But, to instruct his tender mind in the important principles of christian piety seems a most probable method of leading him to a solid and abiding conviction of their truth, and to a happy experience of their influence. Before, then, the evil customs of the world begin to operate, while as yet the seeds of vice in his heart have not been strengthened by them, “train up a child in the way he should go; and, when he is old, he will not depart from it (a).”

Let it, however, always be remembered, that, as the religion of the heart is entirely the fruit of a divine influence, religious instruction, in order to answer the end for which it is designed, should be accompanied with prayer. And, be it remembered, too, that, as religion is a reasonable service, that instruction is most likely to produce the desired effect on the young, which is addressed to their understandings. For, soon will the heart revolt from principles, which are re-

(a) Prov. xxii. 6.

commended

commended to it, by no other motive but the authority of instructors. Religious education, then, while it is founded on principles of reason, and, while it is only expected to be useful under the accompanying influence of the Spirit of God, must, one would think, recommend itself to every impartial mind. Agreeable to this representation, the apostle Paul observes, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (a)."

III. The importance of early piety strongly recommends the practice of religious education.

This importance may be considered, in reference to children, as individuals, as members of the community, and as the probable links in the grand chain of providence, for the conveyance of religious knowledge to posterity.

Consider children merely as individuals. Exclude from your ideas of them every thing

(a) Rom. x. 17.

which

which would lead you to suppose, that, they are serviceable to mankind. Attend to them, only as human beings, and, as those whose private interests are vastly improved by religion.—It is too plain a fact to need vindication in this assembly, that, vice is the sure forerunner of misery. Often does it expose those who are concerned in it to great disadvantages in their worldly connections, and occasions them the loss of their fortunes, of their friends, of their good name. Constantly, if reflection be admitted into the breast (and what human being can live without reflection?) it produces distresses, which are of much greater consequence than the loss of external happiness, the pangs of a wounded conscience, and, “a wounded spirit who can bear (a)?” And, then, if to all this, we add the scripture-account of the nature, the evil, and the dreadful consequences, of sin, not only in this world, but, in that miserable state where “the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched,” how inexpressibly great must

(a) Prov. xviii. 14.

be

be the danger, how infinitely deplorable the prospects, of those who are under its influence ! And, that, even the youngest rational mind possesses a strong propensity in favour of sin, and is indeed greatly defiled by it, we are assured, on the authority both of scripture and reason.

Is it possible, that, you can hear of these miseries which are connected with vice, both in the present and future states, without pitying the unhappy beings who are exposed to them ? Surely not ! Will you not, then, with the most heart-felt pleasure, engage in every method which has a tendency to diminish the influence of sin over human creatures ? And, will not that compassion for the distresses of the young, which is a shining feature in the description of the man of sensibility, influence you peculiarly to exert yourselves, to prevent them from being subjected to the dreadful tyranny of sin ; to which, owing to the weakness of their judgments, and the strength of their passions, connected with the depravity of their hearts, they are peculiarly liable ?

Yes,

Yes, christians ! Influenced by that sympathy which all human creatures ought to feel for each other's distresses, peculiarly influenced by unaffected compassion for those who are rising into life ; you cannot but be earnestly concerned, that, they may be preserved from that wretchedness which is the constant and certain result of vice and impiety, and, that, if it be possible, they may be led to the possession of happiness, infinitely superior to the low and trifling pleasures connected with the pursuits of folly and sin.—And, blessed be God ! it is possible !

Religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of Jesus, is the noblest, the best, may we not say, the only, antidote to the noxious influence of human depravity. It reveals the great and generous plan, contrived by everlasting wisdom, executed by almighty power, directed by infinite goodness, for the recovery of apostate creatures to the favour of the God whom they had offended. It informs us of the method by which the depraved mind of man is brought
to

to the belief, the cordial approbation, the hearty reception, of the most important discoveries which were ever revealed, and to a conformity to those interesting precepts with which they are connected. This places before the weak, defenseless, traveller, the assurance of an heavenly conductor, an all-sufficient support. When painfully convinced of the many transgressions of his heart and life, it leads him to one who can forgive sin. When dejected and almost overcome by the influence of depraved nature, it presents to him that grace which is able not only to forgive sin, but to subdue its power. When fatigued amidst the labours, and almost overwhelmed by the troubles of mortality, it inspires him with the hope of immortal life.—And all this, it represents as built on an immoveable foundation, the unchanging friendship of the eternal God, bestowed through the mediation of his Son, and conveyed by the powerful influences of his Spirit.

To possess the young of such discoveries as these, is, surely, the wisest and kindest method

method of advancing their welfare, which humanity itself can dictate. For parents to act under the influence of these motives, while instructing their children in the principles of religion, that most probable method of accomplishing this design, is, to comply with one of the first laws of nature; the promotion of the happiness of their offspring. Nor can any one, possessed, at the same time, of a due regard for the interests of human creatures, and penetrated by a deep conviction of the reality and importance of religion, refuse to assist the kind undertaking. Surely, then, the tendency of religion, to advance the personal happiness of the young, is a most forcible argument to recommend their being early instructed in its principles; and an argument which cannot be resisted by those, whose highest ambition is to alleviate the distresses, and to increase the happiness, of their fellow-creatures.

But, the importance of early piety is, likewise, to be estimated by the advantages which accrue from the dictates of religion to society. Man was formed for social happi-

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ness;

ness ; and we might well suspect the divine authority of that system of religion, which tended not to promote it. It is the design of the religion of the gospel, to make man useful in this world, as well as happy in that which is to come. And he who knows how much evil has sprung to society from such vices as avarice, pride, envy, and hatred, and, at the same time, consults the language of scripture, will, from its direct tendency to discountenance these ill effects of human apostacy, and, on the contrary, to encourage humility, generosity, compassion, forbearance, and love, be at once convinced, that, to promote religion, is to advance the good of mankind. In order, therefore, to form children for usefulness among their fellow-creatures, as they rise in life, he will use every method in his power, for the accomplishment of this good design. And, among these methods, that which maintains the most conspicuous place, is, early and seasonable instruction in the nature, principles, and tendency, of real religion.

But,

But, while I address christians, it is needless to confine myself to this idea of society, in order to recommend the cultivation of early piety. The interests of the church of Christ are unspeakably dear to a truly good man—He wishes to be beneficial to all, but, he aims peculiarly at the happiness of those who are of “the household of faith.” If, therefore, by promoting the religious welfare of children, he should contribute to the enlargement and prosperity of that sacred community, how great would be his pleasure, how noble his reward ! But, a person of this description, far from confining his views to the present generation, will have in prospect likewise the good of posterity. Religion, he is well convinced, is the most important object to which the attention of rational beings can possibly be directed. From an affectionate regard to the perpetual welfare of the inhabitants of the world, whether considered as individuals, or as members of society, he will esteem it, not only his duty, but his happiness, to exert his abilities, to the utmost, for the

continuance and support of those principles, which appear to him of standing importance. And, tho he is fully persuaded, that the cause of God needs no human influence to preserve it, yet, he knows, that, that great and good Being, in his dispensations towards his human creatures, is frequently pleased to execute his designs, by means of those objects which appear calculated to advance them. Thus, in innumerable instances, are connected those two grand ideas, with which every christian should be strongly impressed; faith, and duty. So, particularly, in the case before us; the man of religion is fully persuaded, that the kingdom of God, and of Jesus Christ, in the world, will be continued to the latest period of time. But he likewise knows, that God intends not, by the displays of his providential and gracious influence, to lessen the exertions, but, on the contrary, to invigorate the zeal, and encourage the resolution, of his creatures. Earnestly desirous, therefore, of extending the knowledge, experience, and love, of the gospel to the most distant

distant periods of time, as well as the most remote countries under heaven, he will, with pleasure, use his efforts to lead the rising generation to an acquaintance with those truths and duties which are of everlasting importance; not only, that, they may receive the benefits of them, themselves, not only that they may advance the welfare of those with whom they are immediately connected, but, that, through their means religious knowledge and truth may be conveyed to their successors on the stage of life. Thus did the Israelites, by divine command, perpetuate their histories, and their religion, from one generation to another (*a*). — Thus may we hope, that, as pure religion and undefiled has continued, even amidst the ruins of human virtue, so it will yet continue, 'till all the tribes of mortals shall have finished their destined course, and religion shall be perfected in a future state. Thus by “shewing the strength of the Lord unto this

(*a*) Exodus xii. 24—27. Joshua iv. 1—9. Psalm lxxviii. 2—7, &c.

“ generation,” shall we declare “ his power
 “ to every one that is to come (a).”

IV. Would the limits of a single discourse admit, we should now proceed to recommend the religious education of the young, from example.

We might set before you, not only innumerable instances recorded in ancient profane history, of parents instructing their offspring in the principles of religion, but many memorable examples in which children have been considered of great advantage to the state, and where very considerable pains have been taken to have them initiated into what were esteemed sacred rites, in order, that they might prove useful to society, and might be the means of conveying religious instruction to distant ages. We might, then, lead you into the families and communities presented to your view in the scriptures of truth, and, after contemplating the harmony, the regularity, the happiness,

(a) Psalm lxxi. 18.

which

which subsisted among them, which all sprang from that practice which we are recommending, we might lead you to the feet of Jesus of Nazareth, whose conduct towards "little children" was surely well worthy the imitation of all who call themselves his disciples. With the voice of unaffected tenderness and friendship, he said, (and O ! that the spirit of this kind language were more diffused among his followers) "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not ; for of such is the kingdom of God (a)." And, to crown the whole, we might place before you the great God acting towards his degenerate creatures as his children ; instructing them by the influences of the spirit accompanying the dictates of his providence and word, in the importance, and leading them in the pursuits, of unaffected piety and goodness, 'till, at length, having conducted them through the various stages of life by his care and friendship, he receives them to those mansions of rest and glory, which he

(a) Mark x. 14.

hath prepared for all who love him. How noble, how animating, the thought ! In promoting the religious welfare of the young, I am not only acting in a manner recommended by the example of good men in all ages, but in a manner recommended by the conduct of the great God, my best friend, towards me. Feel, then, christians, the force of example, and let, especially, the kind condescending friendship of God, and of Jesus Christ, persuade and constrain you, to shew that tender and affectionate regard for the immortal interests of your fellow-creatures, which you expect to receive from infinite mercy.

V. In connection with remarks of this nature, we might farther observe, that, the religious education of children is expressly commanded by God himself. Indeed, the dictates of reason, respecting the performance of duty, might, with propriety, be considered as so many precepts delivered from heaven, because reason is that power of the mind, by which, according to its original constitution,

constitution, it judges of the good or bad qualities, the propriety or the impropriety, of every object proposed to it. But, on a subject of such immense importance, as the cultivation of the human mind, the great God has been pleased to give the most express intimation in his word. Your recollection at once furnishes you with many confirmations of this remark. Tho had we only the language of the text to enforce the practice, especially, since it is recommended by such forcible arguments as those to which we have already attended, we should be inexcusable if we refused to adopt every method presented to our consideration, for diligently instructing our children in the great and important matters of religion. But, instead of enlarging any farther on such ideas as these, we shall, in the last place, suggest a consideration to you, of the greatest importance, a consideration which every heart is capable of feeling, and which, I persuade myself, every heart in this assembly will feel, and that is,

VI. The success which has very frequently attended the religious education of children.

Without this, we should be but poor advocates for the cause we mean to defend. For, after all that has been said respecting the reasonableness and importance of instructing youth in religion, should it be proved, that, religious education had never been productive of any good effect, little hope could we entertain, of impressing your minds with a sense of its propriety and importance. But, we trust, we need be at no pains to convince you, that religious instruction conveyed in early life has very frequently been the means of impressing on the young and tender mind such a sense of the nature and importance of real religion, as it has never lost. By what means was Timothy, that eminent servant of Jesus Christ, made "wise unto salvation," but by the instructions which he received when "a child, from the holy scriptures (a)?" However, it is needless to look back to the

(a) 2 Tim. iii. 15.

days of antiquity, in order to demonstrate the utility of religious education. Are there not many, in our own time, are there not some, in this assembly, whose experience testifies, that, had it not been for the advantages of a religious education, their minds would probably have been uninformed in the principles, their hearts unaffected with the discoveries, and their conduct uninfluenced by the precepts, of the gospel which they profess? And who, that is possessed of a spark of generosity, can forbear being roused and animated with the thought, that, he has this day an opportunity afforded him, of using his influence for the promotion of a design, which has in view both the present and future welfare of those, whose youth, whose inexperience, whose situation in life, all plead, in language which cannot be justly resisted, for the friendly assistance of the humane? And should you, christians, be the instruments of advancing the immortal happiness of one precious soul, how great would be your joy, how elevated your gratitude!

The

The institution, on the behalf of which I now address you, is designed to afford instruction to those children, who, owing to the poverty and the occupations of their parents, are unable to derive from them, those advantages which we have represented in this discourse, as of such immense consequence to their present and future welfare.

The objects for whose relief this charitable institution is intended, are the children of poor Protestant Dissenters, without regard to any particular denomination or party ; a circumstance, which will not fail to recommend it to every one who possesses those disinterested and benevolent views, which are so forcibly inculcated in the gospel.

The children are diligently instructed in the principles of, the religion of the Bible ; and, without any design to fetter their minds with creeds of human invention, but, merely with a view of leading them to a comprehensive acquaintance with that system of revealed truth which is contained in the sacred volume, they are taught that excellent compendium of divinity, the Assembly's
shorter

shorter Catechism :—That the religious instructions which they hear from the pulpit every Lord's-day, may make deep and lasting impressions on their minds, they are required on the Monday, to give as full an account of them, as their improving memories can conveniently retain.—Besides religious instruction, they are likewise made acquainted with those common branches of knowledge, which are calculated to add much to the comfort and advantage, even of the lowest life ; some of which, especially, reading and writing, are indispensably necessary to enable them to fulfil the duties of every station. Arithmetic for the boys, and common needle-work for the girls, are the remaining branches of education, which are afforded them.

The number of children in this school is forty boys, and twenty girls. Nor is it to be doubted, that, the provision of the requisite means for accomplishing the purposes of this plan of education, must be attended with considerable expence ; especially, when it is added, that, if, after the children have

continued

continued the usual time in the school, they have not, by bad behaviour, incurred the displeasure of their benefactors and instructors, they are generously assisted in their entrance on the pursuits of life; so that I am warranted to assure you, that, these expences greatly exceed the present annual income.

On this excellent and liberal plan, was this school instituted in the year 1707. With a view to recommend the institution, and to solicit the kind assistance of those who wish to sustain the highly honourable character of fathers to the poor, two sermons have ever since that time been preached in every year. This is the object which we have kept before us through the whole of the present discourse. And, enough we flatter ourselves, has been said, to recommend the instruction of children, especially their religious instruction, to all; for, a cause supported by humanity, and strengthened by religion, has its best advocate in the generous feelings of the human heart.

Were it necessary to add any thing farther, for the recommendation of this institution, it would be, the importance of the principles of Protestants, especially, of Protestant Dissenters, both of which are greatly encouraged in this school, encouraged, not by positive dogmas, but, by that best of all weapons, plain, solid, rational, conviction. Nor can any friend to truth and liberty forbear rejoicing, that, in a day in which the cause of religion in general is so much neglected, and that of protestant nonconformity in particular, considered even by some who profess themselves its friends, as a matter of little or no importance, there are yet institutions designed and calculated to perpetuate the remembrance of religious truth, and the grounds of religious liberty.

And, christians, once more think (by this motive surely you must be influenced, think) that, by contributing to the religious education of the young, you are pursuing the same great end for which Jesus the Son of God became man, and died on a cross ; the eternal salvation of apostate creatures.

tures. Would you feel the force of this sentiment, as you ought to feel it, look forward to the last great day. See the divine Redeemer seated in majestic pomp on the throne of judgment—Survey the vast assembly—Ah! do you not discover amidst the crowd exulting at his right-hand, some of these little ones, who, by means of your liberality, were brought to an acquaintance with those objects which are of universal importance, just ready to receive the approving sentence of the judge, and, to be advanced to that happy state, where, in the noblest sense, “the rich and the poor meet together.”—See him who of old invited them to himself, him who bare them on his heart, when he delivered the kind commission to his apostle Peter, “feed my “lambs(a),” now placing on their heads, crowns of honour and glory—View the bright unmerited reward prepared for yourselves—Hear the compassionate Jesus, proclaiming with the sweet voice of condescending friendship, “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of

(a) John xxi. 15.

“the

“ the least of these my brethren, ye have
 “ done it unto me—Come ye blessed of my
 “ father, inherit the kingdom prepared for
 “ you from the foundation of the world (*a*).”

If such as these be the noble attendants,
 the enriching fruits, of christian benevo-
 lence, surely “ the saying of the Lord Je-
 “ sus” is most abundantly confirmed, a
 saying, which excellently described the ge-
 nerosity of his heart, and which, I doubt
 not, expresses the feelings of yours—“ It is
 “ more blessed to give than to receive (*b*).”

As an argument to enforce on you the im-
 portant duty we have been recommending,
 we suggested, that, the religious instruction
 of youth has been attended with very great
 success. The history of this institution con-
 firms the fact. Are there not many, who
 are now signal for piety and extensive useful-
 ness, whose first impressions of serious reli-
 gion were derived from the instructions com-
 municated to them, and the prayers offered
 with them and for them, in this school?
 And are not these who now present them-

(*a*) Matt. xxv. 40, 34.

D

(*b*) Acts xx. 35.

selves

selves to your view, who now solicit a small expression of your generosity, are not these convincing proofs of the utility of religious education?

You, my young friends, you alone, are able to give a satisfactory answer to this inquiry. And, I trust, your whole lives will confirm the report of this day. You have heard, with attention, with pleasure, you have heard, how dear your interests are to your fellow-creatures, and you are just about to receive a striking evidence how concerned all this assembly is for your present and immortal happiness. My good opinion of you will not suffer me to indulge the thought, that, you will, by your misconduct, render useless the instructions which you receive. Far, very far, be such a suspicion from every heart in this assembly! With gratitude to your benefactors (and gratitude is a passion peculiarly pleasing in the youthful breast) return to the useful employments which their goodness has marked out for you. Strive to excel in every branch of knowledge, which presents itself to your attention.

Above

Above all, “remember your Creator in the “days of your youth.” If, with all the advantages you possess, you forget your best friend, think, how exposed you will be to all the snares and temptations of life, to the horrors of a wounded conscience, and think, how all these advantages, think, how all this assembly, will rise against you in judgment another day.

But, comply with the earnest wishes of your friends, comply with the command, with the kind tender invitation, of God himself, comply with the dictates of gratitude, interest, and pleasure, by consecrating your early days to the service of heaven. You, at present, know but by report the storms and the dangers of the world. Soon you will be called from the vigilant eyes which now watch over you with unremitting diligence, to appear in the public walks of life. There you will meet with many objects to allure, with many to terrify, you from the paths of religion. And, should you comply with such temptations, how great, how inevitable, would be your misery!

Attend,

Attend, then, to the important principles of religion, those only sure supports amidst the uncertainties of "this present evil world." Cultivate an intimate acquaintance with the truths of the gospel. You will then feel their efficacy at your hearts, you will then express their influence in your behaviour. Especially, be diligent in prayer to that being who alone can connect usefulness with instruction. Implore the assistance of his grace, to preserve you from the temptations of the world, and from the influence of unbelieving hearts. Thus will you be humble, and lowly, and patient, and kind. Thus will you possess "the fear of the Lord," "which is the beginning of wisdom." Thus will you accomplish the good designs of your friends and benefactors. Above all, thus will you, when human excellence, and earthly dignity, pass away, shine as the sun in the firmament of heaven for ever and ever.

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